

53.
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EXTRACT

FROM A

NARRATIVE

OF THE

CONVERSION

And last Illness of

W. F. Esq. late of B——d.



BATH:

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EXTRACT, &c.



FTER giving an account of his former dissipated life, deistical contempt of revelation, the means the mercy of God made use of towards his spiritual awakening and conversion, and the progress of it, the narrative proceeds as follows:

But now I come to the concluding and most important period of his life, his last illness, when the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ (working more effectually to the full manifestation of the election of grace, and of those divine thoughts of peace which in the counsel of God's eternal love to him had been fore-ordained) brought him to such a deep sensibility of his fallen nature, of his transgressions not only against the divine law, but still more against the tender love of his dear Redeemer; and especially of his having fallen so short, in his spiritual race, of that great aim of his dear Lord in chusing him out of the world from among ten thousands to be a chosen vessel of grace, that it may not be amiss to dwell here a little; for the last scene of a man's life, being the winding up of his race, is in general the most interesting part of it. This in particular before us has such divine characters stamped on it, that no room is left to doubt that this was a sickness indeed for the greater glory of God.

About the middle of September 1768, six weeks before his departure, he was seized with such a violent suffocation of breath, judged to be the effect of the gout on his lungs; and attended with such other symptoms of an approaching dissolution, that both his phy-

ficians and himself thought he could not be able to survive it many days. After having done all they could to procure him relief, but in vain, and finding himself given up, "Well! (says he to one of them) Doctor, *jacta est alea*, you have now done with making experiments for my recovery; give me leave, in my turn, to tell you a truth according to my sphere, which I have never yet told you: that small spark of faith, which I feel inkindled in my soul towards my Saviour, is now such a comfort to me, that you may believe me, Doctor, I would not for any thing in this world exchange my condition."

His relations, friends, and servants, will never forget the tender and affecting farwel he took of each of them separately; and with what warmth he prayed over them, and in behalf of those of his domestics whom he thought still unconcerned about their salvation, recommending them to a surrender of their hearts to our Saviour, as the best Lord they could serve.

But Oh what deep searchings now took place! how active and eager was the spirit of his mind to come to the blood of sprinkling as a poor sinner, to have the real application of it to his Soul, to be cloathed with the full salvation of his Saviour, and to miss no part of the ornament of the bride-dress of a chaste virgin espoused to Christ! This deep sense of contrition, poverty, and humiliation of spirit, with these longings of heart, betrayed that his gracious Lord was now busy in shortening that great work of fitting and preparing him as a jewel for his nuptial crown. Doubt he neither did nor could, but that his dear and loving Lord, who had bestowed so much grace on him, would receive him; yet could not this satisfy his soul, which wanted fuller assurance of the intire work of regeneration and renovation being completed in him by the blood of the Lamb; it was therefore the burden of his prayer, that whatever he might suffer in the flesh,

his Lord would not remove him hence till he had finished his full salvation in him, and perfected his holy will.

“ I have (says he) experienced much grace; but the blood of sprinkling, that is what I want; nothing can now help me in these moments, but the blood, the real application of the blood of Jesus. This is more to me than heaven; this I want as MY ONE THING NEEDFUL.”

This appears to have been the burden of his soul's desire during this sickness, nor was he disappointed of his Lord in it.

Thus at another time, after having been it seemed in some distress of mind, as one might judge by his saying, “ I am going through a chemical process,” he broke out abruptly in these words. “ Thy blood, Lord, did prevail, and did prevade me;” and again, “ To be saved by blood, an amazing doctrine! the foolishness of man, but the wisdom of God! Sure as JEHOVAH is thy name, so sure is thy BLOOD the chiefest good of sinners poor—poor—poor!” And this was accompanied with such power, such a blessed feeling and experience of the true poverty of spirit, that he would often express himself to this and a similar effect, “ Oh what sweetness lies in poverty and weakness!—Can any thing be so sweet as forgiveness!—He who will always be in the right, is an unhappy man. We are very often least in the right, when we think ourselves most so.”

Having now found such a sweet relish for the state of the poor in spirit, it is no wonder he was less able to bear himself when at any time he felt a coldness and dry insensibility of heart. This caused him many an anxious prayer for its removal, having been used to complain, that to feel a cold heart to our Saviour was one of the greatest trials to him. His constant prayer was, “ O let me not offend thee by any impatience: give me but resignation to thy will, to do and suffer which is the highest honour angels can enjoy!”

the same nails supporting us both.—I care not what sufferings I am to go through, if only his dear will be fulfilled in me, and I resigned to it: this is my noblest and best aim.—I want only to have his full salvation and conquest completed in me.—No former experience of grace is of any avail to me now in these moments: the question is only, how I stand with our Lord at this present time? neither is any one able, from past experience, to tell how it will be with him in his last hours.—O it is the right way to be saved first and last by our Saviour, with the rope about the neck, as a poor criminal. This I will be.—O it is indeed a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The true application of this is heaven: feel it. Jesus, the friend of poor; lost man!—He takes his delight in things worthless and poor;—and, what is strange, in ME,—in poor worthless ME, so unfaithful towards HIM;—indeed in ME?—I am indeed a miracle of unshaken mercy,—a monument of everlasting love.—I am the unworthiest of all: but one thing I can say,—He is mine, and I am his.”

The pains he suffered in body were indeed severely great, and his departure was often expected by those about him, as well as by himself. This was especially the case on the 24th of October, when he again took tender farewell of those present, and prayed fervently to his Redeemer, though with difficulty of speech from the want of breath, thanking him, with meltedness of heart for the grace bestowed on him, and begging him to receive his spirit. Then turning to his brother, Dear brother (said he, with tears in his eyes) you may believe me, I shall soon see him as he is,—Death hath lost its sting with me.—I have had sore conflicts; but I am CONQUEROR, yea more than conqueror, through his deliverance.—I would not but have gone through what I have, and shall now know how to love and thank him for his great deliverance. Farewell, deceitful world!—Farewell, deceitful heart!—I

have escaped thy snares!" Then, after pausing awhile, added, "O that there might be only true love-union among God's dear children!"

The same afternoon he desired that we might pray the Lord's prayer together, in which he joined most ardently, repeating with great fervency, after he had concluded it, these words "Thy will be done. And then broke out into many precious ejaculations, some of which were these: "Abba, Father! that dear sweet name!—Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world!"

At another time, on the following day, he said, "Last night I thought once I was going, and in that moment there came such a serenity over my mind and such a sweet feeling as I cannot express; so that I see departure out of the body is no hard matter."

And again, after having felt himself under great bodily distress, he broke out, "O my sweet Saviour, not one of thy disciples would watch with thee an hour; and here I am surrounded by friends waiting and weeping over me. O how different was thy condition from mine! Thou wast exposed to the cold night, sweating bloody anguish-sweat, forsaken of all, and lo! I have nothing but help, comfort, and support:—surely none but God could love us so!"

On the 29th at night, the night preceding that of his dissolution, he desired the New Testament might be read to him, which was done out of the 15th and 16th chapters of St. John's gospel, while he in retirement was frequently crying out, "That's charming!—dear Saviour! sweet Saviour!"—and on hearing the last verse read, viz. "In this world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," he broke out, "GRACE!—REDEMPTION! LOVE!—PEACE!—all applied to poor me! I am not afraid of nothing so much as the loss of feeling my poor and low.—O that time is mis-spent, that is spent in the enjoyment of our Saviour!"

The Spirit of our Lord thus operating in him towards his completion, how would he cry out, "All is mystery, mystery, from first to last! the whole process of regeneration is mystery!"

But in order to glorify the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, it must not here be dissembled that he was naturally of a high mind and sharp spirit; because just to those very points where he had been most weak, and least disposed to know himself, it was manifest how faithfully the labour of the Holy Spirit was directed, in order, by making him deeply sensible of it, therein to make him most strong; thus magnifying the glory of his grace, "in pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

The disposition of a poor sinner, low, broken, all over shame, deeming himself the meanest of all, was not only visibly predominant in him, but with what warmth did he declare, that "a high mind was abomination itself in the sight of God, after having judged himself frequently, and that with tears in the presence of many, in this respect, concluding with these words, "All, all except LOVE is misery."

This subject of LOVE he much dwelt upon, was himself exceeding loving, declaring often not only how amiable and precious the children of God were to him in particular, but his love to dear mankind in general as the creation of his gracious Redeemer.

As a further demonstration of what grace effected in detaching him from objects the most ensnaring to him, and which he now lamented as obstacles that had detained him in running joyfully the race set before him, it is to be observed, that he had a doting and excessive fondness for his children, which now he found had resisted the full resignation of them to his

Saviour: " But this bondage I am now (said he) freed from, thanks be to God. I am now as altered as a man herein can be;—no more the same. Who would have thought it? All I now desire is, that they may fall into our Saviour's hands, and be his property. Grace alone is able to do this; children of God I know they cannot be by education. I have no scheme to insist on about their future disposal; but what the Lord's will concerning them may be, that is mine too: in comparison with this, it is now become a matter of indifference whether they are rich or poor, in health or in sickness: all I pray for is, that they may be his."

During the course of his sickness, he would often beg those who were about him to pray that the Lord would come soon and take him. He found great delight in hearing the holy scripture read to him (which was frequently done to his unspeakable comfort) and in joining in prayer with those who attended him, which he did with great fervency, as well as participate of the divine mystery of the holy sacrament.

At those times, when the feeling enjoyment of the love and presence of his Beloved seemed withdrawn from him, he was troubled, and would say, " To believe only, is easily said; but believe me, it is not so easy as some may think it, before they come into my circumstances. This is indeed putting the heart to the true test. I am afraid my faith will fail me. Do you think I shall be able to hold it out to the last?" And then immediately answering the question himself, would reply, " O yes, he will surely never forsake his poor creature; but he wants only to try my faith to the utmost. My sweet Saviour, it is impossible thy name should be Jesus Christ, and I not happy. I have no hope but in thee, and I hang only on thee. O that sweet name!—May he take me by the hand, and lead me into the cold grave, wherein he has been laid himself.—I think I am hanging on the cross with him,

In conversation with him, one of his friends observed to him this remark made by a respectable minister of Jesus Christ, the late Rev. Mr. Gambold, viz. that the most valuable and heavenly light that can be conveyed into any soul in this world, and the surest criterion of real grace, is when it is given us to have a deep sense of the torments and dying love of Jesus, and a living persuasion of the great efficacy of his cross and merits; consequently the tenderest attachment of the heart to him; here at once he broke out, "Aye! is that the criterion?—Then I am right;"—and on this began weeping with joy, and saying, "Thou knowest, my dearest Saviour, I only cleave to and hang upon thee," &c.

The same night he declared his tender love to some of his friends, and, to use his own words, "Tell them, I know that my Redeemer liveth, whom I shall see for myself: even I:—don't forget *even I*;—such a poor creature!—tell them, I hang only on the cross."

The 30th he moan'd heart-piercingly, partly from an agonizing pain in his breast with inward contractions, and partly from an apprehension lest there should be any thing still remaining which might hinder his Lord from the final accomplishment of his views; it should seem moreover that he had been under some trying conflict of faith. He was at this crisis put in mind of the many striking proofs of the Redeemer's love and mercy to him, and that he could have no reason to doubt that his aim was to glorify himself in his complete redemption.—Recovering himself as it were suddenly on this,—“Yes (replied he) and ALL THY WILL, my dearest Saviour, SHALL be done in me.” Then with a warm resentment against himself, added, “Fool that I am!—What should I be afraid of? Of thee, my sweetest Jesus?—a Lamb that was slain for my sins? No, no! thy name is JESUS, the sweetest of all names; a name comprehensive of all thine infinite goodness and mercy.”

Then he prayed with many tears that his Redeemer would have mercy on him, and remove him soon out of all misery.—Peace now flowed in as a river on him, and he rejoiced as a child. The man's part was now broken in him; and it was easy to discern that he was converted into one of those little children, who, as such, enter into the kingdom. From this spirit it was he said, "to become a child, believe me, is the highest christianity."

He now desired that a hymn of Mr. Cennick might be sung, which begins with, "O my dear Saviour, when thy cares," &c. in which he joined with streaming tears; but when the four last verses were sung, here he raised his voice with uncommon force, and in a very affecting manner joined in with these lines:

Still be thy wounds to me more dear,

More precious ev'ry day;

Till I at thy pierc'd feet appear,

Drest in thy bright array.

Then prostrate will I fall before

That body, Lord, of thine,

With wounds and blood once cover'd o'er,

Yet sinless and divine.

My lips shall then sincerely kiss

Each wound, and ev'ry scar;

And grateful will I say,—My bliss

I poorest dust found here.

While ev'ry angel, throne, and power,

Thy boundless merit sounds,

I'll sing and thankfully adore

My Saviour and his wounds.

The divine power and presence of the Lord, during this time, was sensibly felt by all that were present, and indeed is far beyond all expression.—The remaining part of the evening he was chearful and serene; and that night, which was his last, pretty easy, sleeping more than he had done for some weeks before, and frequently calling out, "Sweet Saviour."

The last day of October, about six in the morning, feeling an extraordinary weakness come upon him, he said, "Ah! if the convulsions would but come now, all would be over!" Soon after a convulsion-fit succeeded, which in a few minutes gratified his wishes, by making a happy end of all his bodily distress without a sigh or a groan, and proved the blessed means of translating his precious soul into the arms of his Creator and Redeemer.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: even so, saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labour."

On his CONVERSION: *Written by himself, and found among his papers after his decease.*

THIRTY whole years I ran in debt,
A large account was due,
Inscrib'd in capitals of jet,
Of which I little knew.
My mind, how prodigal of sin!
As any heir of gold:
How little was my purse within,
I thought not, nor was told.
At length, as one may well suppose,
My creditor appears;
The rigid law his just right shews,
(Ah, how I groan'd with fears!)
"Behold, bold sinner, what is due
"For sins against thy God!
"Two tables which were written, shew
"How vast their dreadful load!"
Aghast I star'd, and look'd around,
For nought I had to pay;
The law's inexorable found.
And caus'd me great dismay!
The sentence for insolvency,
"Take, bind both foot and hand:
"Away,—torment!"—with fervency
Was given this command.
I knew it just, and acquiesc'd;
But look'd around to see

If I could not be fet at rest
By means of mercy free.

When lo! a bail for me appears,
With a receipt below,
Wrote with his precious blood;—his tears
Had wash'd my jet to snow.

“ The full amount of what is due
“ From that poor sinner vile,
“ *That* I've receiv'd;—these blood-marks shew
“ He's now become my spoil.”

O never shall my soul forget
This his redeeming love:
This mercy shall my song repeat
In ceaseless strains above.

Th' hand-writing now is done away,
My punishment he bore;
My utmost farthing he did pay,
And felt my torments fore.

His hands and feet for me were bound
By nails to caly'ry's cross;
His soul, beset with horrors round,
Of God complain'd the loss.

To him who gave himself for me,
Myself I'll now resign;
With him enjoy his blessings free,
Give him myself and mine.

“ Midst joys of faith I'll ne'er forget
The solid sense of sin,
That I keep humbly at his feet,
Where I so oft have been

If now I grieve my Jesu's heart,
Which still I often do,
I'm sensible of pungent smart,
Because he loves me so.

When he my faults doth soon forgive,
(Which he has always done)
It only makes me grieve to grieve,
To faithful love more prone.

F I N I S.